

Excerpts from my field diary (July 2009 onwards)

Pankaj Oudhia

Interaction with Traditional Bird Catchers and visit to sacred place for collection of Ankol flowers.

Pankaj Oudhia

“Who are they?” I asked to the Traditional Healers travelling with me. Two natives were sitting in shade of Mahua tree in place far from village. We stopped there for taking pictures of ground spider web spread allover the barren fields.

“Let us go there and ask to them.” The Healers said.

After taking pictures of webs I focused my attention on dense population of Echinops near rice fields. I collected roots for the Healers having expertise in treatment of renal troubles. It is common plant in area where I live but rare in place where I was there at that time.





“They are traditional bird catchers.” The Healers informed. It generated interest in me. Although I am not a bird expert but I have written a lot on different aspects of birds and documented its diversity in different states. Local newspapers and students regularly send pictures of birds to me for identification. Frankly speaking I use books present in my library and internet for identification. I have mentioned in previous research articles that from childhood I was the patient of myopia. Heavy eye glasses were part of my life till post graduation. At that time I was able to identify weeds and small herbs in surroundings. Due to poor eye sight I was less interested in large trees and birds sitting on it. After laser surgery my eye sight improved miraculously. Now everything is visible. But poor interest in birds from childhood continued even after getting good eye sight. During this visit the activities of traditional bird catchers attracted my attention and I decided to interact with them and prepare video.

[Related Film:

Oudhia, P. (2010). Traditional Bird Catchers in action in rural Chhattisgarh. Film by Pankaj Oudhia. <http://www.pankajoudhia.com/video105.html>]

“The birds specially birds locally known as Harir visit to this spot to eat soil.” One of the bird catchers informed. I was aware of geophagy in birds but never seen it. “Another bird locally name as Titur visits to this place for Geophagy. We are here to catch both types of birds. Both are tasty. We arranged this simple trap prepared from strings and placed it here last night. This morning we found that someone has stolen the trapped birds and consumed at this place. We are cheated. Now we will stay here and catch the birds immediately from trap.” They informed.

“These birds feed on wild fruits and in order to keep digestion well it consumes soil. The soil of this place is special as there is no such spot in surroundings. As it is near to Mahua tree, birds visit to this spot immediately after consuming fruits. The minus point for us is its nearness to busy rural road. Trapped birds are visible from road and this is the reason someone has stolen our birds. It is not possible to shift the soil to other place. We tried to cover the area with spiny bush but in such arrangements birds hesitate to visit here.” They disclosed everything.

We waited for a while and then moved forward with hope to return again to see trapped birds but after making three to four rounds we failed to take pictures. The catchers were still there. The Healers informed that these natives are fond of birds. It is main part of food in many months. Due to their clever mind and poor intelligence of birds, the natural population is decreasing at alarming rates. We understand the seriousness of problem but this type of catching and hunting is a part of traditional in rural society. No one can dare to interfere in it.

Later in the day I visited to sacred place near far village where natives are protecting hundreds of Ankol trees. In this place old Semal, Parsa, Bael and Pipal trees are also growing. The Healers helped me in taking pictures of Ankol flowers. Seeing us in sacred place many school children surrounded us with curiosity. During last visit we found them in this place. At that time Ankol trees were loaded with fruits. Children like these fruits and wait for fruiting round the year. I requested them to stand near old Semal tree growing with Ankol tree for taking picture.







“There is a big snake inside dead hollow trunk of Khair tree.” One of them whispered. They informed that a python has taken shelter in this trunk. “There are many such pythons in this place. As it is sacred place cutting of trees as well killing of animals taking shelter in this place are strictly prohibited. It seems that python is well aware of it.” The Healer said. We decided not to disturb the resting snake in peak summer day.

We collected fallen flowers of Ankol in bulk. The Healers prepare special oil by using these flowers and use it round the year. They promised to give this special oil to me for patients and family friends visit to me regularly.

How to Cite this Research Document

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